

# **Formulating Expected Learning Outcomes for the Bachelor of Business Administration Program: Linking to the Requirements of External Stakeholders**

Phathara-on Wesarat<sup>1\*</sup>, Nursahida Useng<sup>1</sup>, Rudsada Kaewsaeng-on<sup>1</sup>, Daranat Tansui<sup>1</sup>, Kanyaprin Tongsamsi<sup>1</sup>,  
Warrapojn Panrod<sup>1</sup> and Parichard Benrit<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

University's business curricula (e.g. Bachelor of Business Administration: B.B.A.) face a challenge on how to produce graduates to meet the current and future requirements of stakeholders. International standards of education such as the ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance (AUN-QA) and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) focus on the concept of outcome-based education (OBE) whereby the requirements of stakeholders, especially external stakeholders need to be concerned. Thus, the university business curricula should investigate the requirements of stakeholders in order to formulate program learning outcomes (PLOs) to meet such requirements. Since the needs of stakeholders in a particular area may be different than others, this article aims to determine the requirements of external stakeholders of the Bachelor of Business Administration Program (B.B.A. Program), Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla University (Pattani Campus) located in Southernmost Thailand. The objectives of this study are: 1) to determine the requirements of external stakeholders on the attributes of business administration graduates and 2) to formulate the expected learning outcomes for the B.B.A. Program based on the requirements of external stakeholders. Criterion was used for participant selection as it is the purposeful sampling strategy for a qualitative study. The data were collected from 43 respondents including 36 primary stakeholders and 7 secondary stakeholders. A qualitative method was adopted to thematically categorize and analyze the data. The results showed that there were nine items of expected learning outcomes (ELOs) of the B.B.A. Program. These

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus

\* Corresponding author: E-mail address: phathara-on.w@psu.ac.th

program learning outcomes (PLOs) could be applied to other B.B.A. Programs with similar requirements of stakeholders.

**Keywords :** Bachelor of Business Administration, Curriculum Design, Learning Outcome, Outcome-Based Education

## Introduction

The fourth industrial revolution has an impact on labor market that requires new competences for coping with a new work context due to digital transformation and artificial intelligence (AI) (Ivaldi, Scaratti & Fregnani, 2021). To avoid a business failure, employers are looking for hiring competent employees who are able to perform a real-world task under uncertain business environment (Karanja & Malone, 2021). Therefore, university's business curricula should aim at producing graduates who are ready to pursue a career (Pradhan, 2021). The concept of outcome-based education (OBE) has been globally recognized as a significant concept to guide the curriculum design, teaching and learning approach, and assessment method of the study program (Gunarathne, Senaratne & Senanayake, 2020). The concept of OBE should be applied to the study program to ensure that students will be able to do certain things or to achieve expected learning outcomes (ELOs) before their graduation from the university (Pradhan, 2021; Songsom & Khitmoh, 2021).

In Thailand, unemployment rate was at 1.69% by year 2020 (Bank of Thailand, 2021). There were 651,100 unemployed persons (Bank of Thailand, 2021). But the information on unemployment rate of graduates from a particular program of study is still limited. Unemployment can be caused by several factors including a mismatch between skills of job seekers and employer expectations that leads to high unemployment (Stimanon, 2017). The mismatch is resulted from low quality of formal education that provides lower skills than the expected skills (Stimanon, 2017). Accordingly, the international standards of education (e.g. the ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance: AUN-QA) place a higher value on the requirements of external stakeholders than internal stakeholders when formulating ELOs for a study program (AUN-QA, 2020). AUN-QA suggests that the requirements of external stakeholders must be integrated into ELOs while the requirements of internal stakeholders are not compulsory (AUN-QA, 2020). The ELOs that are linked to the requirements of external stakeholders (e.g. employers) will improve employability of graduates (Finch, Hamilton, Baldwin & Zehner, 2013). Thus, this article focuses on the

requirements of external stakeholders that can be exclusively utilized for developing program learning outcomes (PLOs).

However, research on formulating ELOs for a particular program of study was rarely seen. This study aims at determining the requirements of external stakeholders on the attributes of business administration graduates, specifically in the Bachelor of Business Administration Program, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus located in Southernmost Thailand. The data collected from external stakeholders were thematically categorized and analyzed. The refined themes were used to formulate the ELOs for the B.B.A. Program. A qualitative research approach used in this study could be applied to future research on this issue, especially those that aim to determine the requirements of stakeholders based on qualitative data.

## **Objective**

1. To determine the requirements of external stakeholders on the attributes of business administration graduates.
2. To formulate the expected learning outcomes for the Bachelor of Business Administration Program based on the requirements of external stakeholders.

## **Literature review**

Since this article aims to formulate ELOs based on the requirements of external stakeholders, human capital theory and signaling theory are applicable to this study because both theories focused on individuals' abilities or outcomes that are acquired through their learning and experiences (Fahrenbach, 2021). Human capital theory and signaling theory have been applied by the past research on higher education (Rospigliosi, Greener, Bourner & Sheehan, 2014). The theories provide the contribution of increasing competent and productive graduates to labor market (Rospigliosi et al., 2014). This section discusses the related theories, graduate attributes, learning outcomes, and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

### **1. Human Capital Theory**

A key element to develop human capital is education because it influences a person's readiness for effectively perform future work (Kasa, Kho, Yong, Hussain & Lau, 2020). Human capital theory (Becker, 1993 as cited in Ghignoni, Croce & d'Ambrosio, 2019) contended that time spent in education enhances human capital and sustains labor market outcomes. Zheng, Xu, Chen

and Dong (2017) asserted that there is a relationship between human capital and entrepreneurial success. But outcomes of human capital (e.g. knowledge, skills, and abilities: KSAs) are more important than human capital investments alone (e.g. education and experience) (Zheng et al., 2017). Especially, human capital that is a task-related dimension is viewed as most important to business success (Zheng et al., 2017). According to Zheng et al. (2017), human capital theory can be applied to this study because it provides a concept that is applicable to formulating ELOs for the B.B.A. Program. Indeed, ELOs should reflect outcomes of human capital (Lasić-Lazić, Zorica & Špiranec, 2011).

## 2. Signaling Theory

Based on signaling theory, the signaler demonstrates the signal that can be the particular characteristic (e.g. quality) to the receiver (Presley, Presley & Blum, 2018). Signaling theory emphasizes the interactions between two parties to communicate the certain unobservable quality (König, Richter & Isak, 2021). Both parties can communicate signals of interest (König et al., 2021).

There are the criteria that are perceived by employers (or other relevant stakeholders) as a signal of high quality business education (Jr., MacKenzie, Scherer, Wilkinson & Solomon, 2020). Universities and study programs that effectively present the proper signals to stakeholders will achieve success (Minutolo, Ivanova & Cong, 2021). On one hand, university's curricula may communicate the certain signals to stakeholders (e.g. university's educational philosophy, students' attitudes and abilities) (König et al., 2021; Minutolo et al., 2021). On the other hand, they could absorb the signals from stakeholders (e.g. a company's mission and strategies) that are useful for developing graduate attributes requested by employers (König et al., 2021; Minutolo et al., 2021).

However, Pavlin (2014) argued that higher education institutions do not responsible enough to collect information about their graduates' careers (such as skills match and career advancement opportunities) in order to improve graduates' employability. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine the requirements for the graduate attributes based on the data collected from the external stakeholders of the B.B.A. Program. This could enhance skills match and promote career success of business administration graduates.

## 3. Graduate Attributes

Graduate attributes refer to core characteristics of graduates that are part of their identity (O'Connor, Lynch & Owen, 2011). Graduate attributes encompass graduate qualities, knowledge, skills, abilities, and values which should be acquired by graduates (Donleavy, 2012; O'Connor et

al., 2011). However, graduate attributes are perceived differently by different people. This seems like the study programs should know what expected attributes are (O'Connor et al., 2011). Normally, graduate attributes are composed of two main types: 1) the capacity for citizenship and the ability to contribute to a society, and 2) the capacity to gain and maintain work (i.e. employability) (Tempone, Kavanagh, Segal, Hancock, Howieson & Kent, 2012). Developing appropriate graduate attributes enables graduates to gain employment and to be successful in their chosen careers (Tempone et al., 2012). To prepare students to be more adaptable in changing world of work and to increase employability, graduate attributes should be integrated into curriculum design and learning outcomes (Maxwell & Armellini, 2019).

#### 4. Learning Outcomes

The two terms, “learning outcomes” and “competences” are sometimes used interchangeably (Lasić-Lazić et al., 2011). Learning outcomes are learning accomplishments from the perspective of study programs, while competences refer to learning achievements based on the view of students (Lasić-Lazić et al., 2011). General competences encompass knowledge, skills, attitudes, and responsibilities that are commonly used in all study programs, while subject-specific competences are used in a particular program of study (Lasić-Lazić et al., 2011). Learning outcomes of a study program can be related to both general and subject-specific competences (Lasić-Lazić et al., 2011).

Learning outcomes refer to “statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do after completion of learning” (Cervai, Cian, Berlanga, Borelli & Kekäle, 2013, p. 201). The definition of learning outcomes defined by Cervai et al. (2013) was applied to this study. From a higher education perspective, learning outcomes refer to what students are expected to achieve within the time of learning course (i.e. course learning outcomes) or the time of graduation (i.e. program learning outcomes) (Reich, Collins, DeFranco & Pieper, 2019). This study focuses on learning outcomes at program level that students are expected to achieve within the time of graduation.

Generally, the goal of industries is to gain organizational success while the goal of individual employees is to reach career success (Blanco, Sastre-Castillo & Montoro-Sánchez, 2021). Both organizational success and individual’s career success will be achieved through the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes (Blanco et al., 2021). Kasa et al. (2020) stated that graduates should not only be trained to acquire practical skills and theoretical knowledge that

are related to industries, but also should be able to perform ethically in their chosen careers (Kasa et al., 2020).

### 5. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

21<sup>st</sup> century skills are important to produce 21<sup>st</sup> century learners (Kim, Raza & Seidman, 2019). 21<sup>st</sup> century skills are transferable skills that learners can use these skills in another context (e.g. in the workplace) (Bertrand & Namukasa, 2020). 21<sup>st</sup> century skills generally include competencies such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, digital and technological literacy, communication, leadership, collaboration, social skills (e.g. public speaking), etc. (Kim et al., 2019; Vela, Pedersen & Baucum, 2020). Acquiring 21<sup>st</sup> century skills will help learners to effectively manage the complexity of a changing world of work (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2020). For example, learners will be able to seek new information from various sources, and interpret information into knowledge that can be applied to solve problems or work in different contexts (Raymundo, 2020).

Based on literature, developing ELOs of a study program needs to integrate related theories, the concepts of graduate attributes, and 21st century skills. ELOs are supposed to reflect human capital, signals of graduate quality, graduate attributes, and 21st century skills. The related theories and concepts presented in this section were used as a guideline for developing the questions posed in a questionnaire. Consequently, the data collected from respondents using a questionnaire were used to formulate appropriate ELOs that could enhance employability of graduates.

## Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative method for data collection and data analysis. A questionnaire with open-ended questions was adopted for data collection. The questions posed in a questionnaire were based on the research objectives, for example, “what expectations do you have of university graduates in the field of business administration?”

A purposive sampling was used for participant selection because it is commonly used by the past qualitative studies to select the key informants who are able to give the information and who are willing to participate in the study (Lubbe, 2014). Stakeholders refer to the groups or individuals who influence or are influenced by an organization (Al-Hazaima, Low & Sharma, 2021). Thus, organizations (or individuals) who influence or are influenced by the B.B.A. Program are considered as stakeholders of the B.B.A. Program.

In this article, the term “external stakeholders” refers to the stakeholders outside Prince of Songkla University who influence or who are influenced by the B.B.A. Program (Al-Hazaima et al.; AUN-QA, 2020). This was based on the standards of education namely “AUN-QA” which emphasizes external stakeholders when developing ELOs to meet the demands of industries (AUN-QA, 2020). According to purposeful sampling strategy, criterion is used as a type of sampling for a qualitative study (Creswell, 1998). Respondents are selected from individuals who meet the criterion (Creswell, 1998). The definition of external stakeholders was used as a criterion for selecting external stakeholders (Al-Hazaima et al.; AUN-QA, 2020). Based on the definition of external stakeholders (Al-Hazaima et al.; AUN-QA, 2020), all administrative committees of the B.B.A. Program were invited to develop the list of external stakeholders for data collection. The external stakeholders of the B.B.A. Program were selected using brainstorming technique as it is useful to summarize the key points by group members (Boddy, 2012). The data were collected from the respective stakeholders. Overall, 43 respondents were involved in the study. The research has been conducted from February 2020 to January 2021.

The categorization of external stakeholders was based on the criterion used in this study that was “the area or location”. This is because the purpose of the establishment of the B.B.A. Program was mainly to serve the needs of stakeholders in Southernmost Thailand (Bachelor of Business Administration Program, 2021). The administrative committees of the B.B.A. Program categorized external stakeholders of the B.B.A. Program into two groups: primary and secondary stakeholders (table 1). The primary stakeholders are stakeholders within Southernmost Thailand while the secondary stakeholders are stakeholders outside Southernmost Thailand. In this article, both primary data (the data collected from the respondents using a questionnaire) and secondary data (e.g. published information or official information provided by the organization) were used for data analysis.

**Table 1** External Stakeholders of the B.B.A. Program

<b>Groups of External Stakeholders</b>	
<b>Primary Stakeholders</b>	<b>Secondary Stakeholders</b>
1. Business organizations (1 respondent)	1. Central governmental organizations (2
2. Entrepreneurs (2 respondents)	respondent)
3. Governmental organizations (3 respondents)	2. Entrepreneurs (2 respondents)
4. Public enterprises (1 respondent)	3. Domestic companies (2 respondents)

**Table 1** (Continued)

Groups of External Stakeholders	
Primary Stakeholders	Secondary Stakeholders
5. Employers (1 respondent)	4. Thai companies with international branches in ASEAN countries (1 respondent)
6. Alumni who being entrepreneurs (2 respondents)	
7. Alumni who being employees (2 respondents)	
8. New graduates (12 respondents)	
9. High school students (12 respondents)	

Hahn's (2008) data analysis model was adopted for this study. According to Hahn's (2008) model, three levels of qualitative data analysis were applied comprising initial coding (level 1), focused coding (level 2), and thematic coding (level 3). The data were thematically categorized and analyzed based on the objectives of the study. While the themes were refined by researchers several times to become accurate themes, the latest refined themes were ready to be used to formulate ELOs.

## Results

The data were analyzed based on the research objectives. According to the objective 1, the results were shown in table 2.

Objective 1: To determine the requirements of external stakeholders on the attributes of business administration graduates.

**Table 2** The Requirements of External Stakeholders on the Attributes of Business Administration Graduates

Refined Themes on the Requirements of External Stakeholders on the Attributes of Business Administration Graduates	External Stakeholders	
	Primary Stakeholder	Secondary Stakeholder
Theme1: Knowledge of business administration in general	- Employers - Entrepreneurs - Governmental organizations	- Central governmental organizations - Domestic companies

**Table 2 (Continued)**

<b>Refined Themes on the Requirements of External Stakeholders on the Attributes of Business Administration Graduates</b>		<b>External Stakeholders</b>	
<b>External Stakeholders on the Attributes of Business Administration Graduates</b>		<b>Primary Stakeholder</b>	<b>Secondary Stakeholder</b>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Alumni who being employees</li> <li>- Alumni who being entrepreneurs</li> <li>- New graduates</li> <li>- High school students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Central governmental organizations</li> <li>- Domestic companies</li> </ul>
Theme2: Knowledge of business administration in various contexts (e.g. in Southernmost context, Islamic context, and global context)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Governmental organizations</li> <li>- Public enterprises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Domestic companies</li> </ul>
Theme3: Communication skills in various contexts (e.g. foreign language skills and cross-cultural communication skills)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Governmental organizations</li> <li>- Business organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Central governmental organizations</li> <li>- Domestic companies</li> <li>- Thai companies with international branches in ASEAN countries</li> </ul>
Theme4: Business ethics and social responsibility		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Entrepreneurs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Entrepreneurs</li> <li>- Domestic companies</li> </ul>
Theme5: Leadership and emotional intelligence		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Alumni who being employees</li> <li>- Alumni who being entrepreneurs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Central governmental organizations</li> </ul>
Theme6: Analytical skills (e.g. analyzing job trends)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Employers</li> <li>- Alumni who being employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thai companies with international branches in ASEAN countries</li> </ul>

**Table 2 (Continued)**

External Stakeholders on the Attributes of <b>Business Administration Graduates</b>	External Stakeholders	
	Primary Stakeholder	Secondary Stakeholder
	<b>Refined Themes on the Requirements of</b>	
Theme7: Planning skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Alumni who being employees</li> <li>- Governmental organizations</li> <li>- Business organizations</li> <li>- High school student</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Domestic companies</li> <li>- Domestic companies</li> </ul>
Theme8: Problem-solving skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Employers</li> <li>- Business organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Central governmental organizations</li> </ul>
Theme9: Digital skills and technological skills related to work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Alumni who being entrepreneurs</li> <li>- New graduates</li> <li>- Public enterprises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Entrepreneurs</li> <li>- Central governmental organizations</li> </ul>
Theme10: Interpersonal skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Business organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Entrepreneurs</li> <li>- Central governmental organizations</li> </ul>
Theme11: Presentation and negotiation skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Governmental organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thai companies with international branches in ASEAN countries</li> </ul>
Theme12: Data analysis and decision-making skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Central governmental organizations</li> <li>- Domestic companies</li> <li>- Thai companies with international branches in ASEAN countries</li> </ul>

Table 2 presents that the requirements of external stakeholders on the attributes of business administration graduates were categorized into twelve refined themes as below.

1. Knowledge of business administration in general
2. Knowledge of business administration in various contexts (e.g. in Southernmost context, Islamic context, and global context)
3. Communication skills in various contexts (e.g. foreign language skills and cross-cultural communication skills)
4. Business ethics and social responsibility
5. Leadership and emotional intelligence
6. Analytical skills (e.g. analyzing job trends)
7. Planning skills
8. Problem-solving skills
9. Digital skills and technological skills related to work
10. Interpersonal skills
11. Presentation and negotiation skills
12. Data analysis and decision-making skills

Based on objective 2, the expected learning outcomes were formulated as shown in table 3.

Objective 2: To formulate the expected learning outcomes for the Bachelor of Business Administration Program based on the requirements of external stakeholders.

In this section, expected learning outcomes at program level are also referred to as program learning outcomes (PLOs). Overall, there were nine items of PLOs for the B.B.A. Program. All nine items of PLOs were developed based on the refined themes which were derived from the recommendations of external stakeholders (comprising primary and secondary stakeholders). PLOs reflect what external stakeholders expected to graduates from the B.B.A. Program, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla University (Pattani Campus) in Southernmost Thailand.

**Table 3** Formulation of PLOs Based on the Requirements of External Stakeholders

Refined Themes on the Requirements of External Stakeholders on the Attributes of Business	Program Learning Outcomes
<b>Administration Graduates</b>	
Theme1/Theme2/Theme6/Theme7/Theme8/Theme12	PLO1 “Apply knowledge of business administration in different contexts”
Theme6/Theme7/Theme8/ Theme12	PLO2 “Solve management problems in accordance with situations, spatial and cultural contexts”
Theme4	PLO3 “Manage the organization on the basis of ethics and social responsibility”
Theme3/ Theme10/ Theme11	PLO4 “Communicate across cultures and build diverse networks”
Theme5/Theme10/Theme11	PLO5 “Have leadership skills, be able to control emotions, and deal with pressure in various situations”
Theme1/Theme2/Theme6/ Theme7/Theme8/ Theme12	PLO6 “Be a human resource professional in various contexts”
Theme1/Theme2/Theme6/ Theme7/Theme8/ Theme12	PLO7 “Be an entrepreneur both in the local and non-local areas”
Theme1/Theme2/Theme6/Theme7/ Theme12	PLO8 “Manage a business based on the principles of Islam in accordance with local and global contexts”
Theme9/Theme12	PLO9 “Apply information technology in business administration to pursue work”

The categorization of PLOs (comprising generic and subject-specific PLOs) was based on the definition of learning outcomes by Lasić-Lazić et al. (2011) as mentioned earlier. The study found that PLOs of the B.B.A. Program are composed of both generic and subject-specific PLOs (table 4).

**Table 4** Classification of Program Learning Outcomes

Program Learning Outcomes	Generic	Subject-Specific
PLO1 “Apply knowledge of business administration in different contexts”		✓
PLO2 “Solve management problems in accordance with situations, spatial and cultural contexts”		✓
PLO3 “Manage the organization on the basis of ethics and social responsibility”		✓
PLO4 “Communicate across cultures and build diverse networks”	✓	
PLO5 “Have leadership skills, be able to control emotions, and deal with pressure in various situations”	✓	
PLO6 “Be a human resource professional in various contexts”		✓
PLO7 “Be an entrepreneur both in the local and non-local areas”		✓
PLO8 “Manage a business based on the principles of Islam in accordance with local and global contexts”		✓
PLO9 “Apply information technology in business administration to pursue work”		✓

As mentioned in table 4, two PLOs are generic learning outcomes while seven PLOs are subject-specific learning outcomes. Considering the requirements of external stakeholders, both generic and subject-specific skills were addressed. Therefore, this study formulated ELOs that included both generic and subject-specific learning outcomes. External stakeholders not only require knowledge and skills regarding business administration in global context, but also in the context of Southernmost Thailand and Islamic perspective. Southernmost of Thailand is different from other parts of Thailand in terms of language, culture, and religion (Albritton, 2010). Muslim population is the majority in this region (Albritton, 2010). Because of that, external stakeholders argued that business administration in Islamic context is important to developing the attributes of graduates in the B.B.A. Program.

Additionally, external stakeholders expressed their requirements that are in accordance with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as analytical skills, problem-solving skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, negotiation skills, digital and technological skills, leadership and emotional intelligence, and decision-making skills (Reimers, 2020). Reimers (2020) maintained that employers need the skills that enable employees to be self-motivated, flexible, and innovative so that they would be able to handle any situation at work effectively.

Changing economic, social, and technological environments influence university's business curricula. For example, the unexpected arrival of coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has an impact on education transformation worldwide. There has been an increasing of the use of ICT for teaching and learning whereby digital and technological skills are required (Latorre-Cosculuelo, Suárez, Quiroga, Sobradiel-Sierra, Lazono-Blasco & Rodríguez-Martínez, 2021). In the same manner, digital and technological skills are viewed by employers as extremely important to improve employability of graduates (McGunagle & Zizka, 2020). Consistently, the external stakeholders of the B.B.A. Program emphasized the importance of "digital skills and technological skills related to work". This seems like the PLO9 "apply information technology in business administration to pursue work" is still up-to-date.

In this study, PLOs shed light on business administration in various contexts. Especially, the PLO8 "manage a business based on the principles of Islam in accordance with local and global contexts" shows the potential to meet local demands in the context of Southernmost Thailand as well as global demands.

Besides that, this study considered ethical issues as crucial for business administration graduates. Since a study by Kasa et al. (2020) argued that graduates should be able to pursue their work ethically, this study formulated the PLO3 "manage the organization on the basis of ethics and social responsibility". Ethical behavior of both employees and leaders fosters high performance and productivity of firms (Faheem, Ahmed, Ain & Iqbal, 2021).

## Discussion

Similar to a study by Tempone et al. (2012) which indicated two main types of graduate attributes (comprising "the ability to contribute to a society" and "the employability"), this study found that the requirements of external stakeholders on the attributes of business administration graduates covered both categories of graduate attributes. Firstly, external stakeholders addressed the importance of social responsibility. Secondly, they expressed the skills required for pursuing work

or running a successful business (e.g. problem-solving skills, digital skills, and analytical skills) which can increase the employability of graduates (Reimers, 2020). To be ready for entering the job market in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, graduates should acquire 21<sup>st</sup> century skills (Reimers, 2020). Employability allows a person to recognize and realize professional opportunities (PM, Zakkariya & Philip, 2022). Logically, formulating ELOs based on these requirements would enhance employability of business administration graduates.

Two theories namely human capital theory and signaling theory were applied to this study. Although the concept of human capital (based on human capital theory) is applicable to this study, outcomes of human capital (KSAs) (Zheng et al., 2017) may need to be adapted for the particular curriculum in a specific area (including the B.B.A. Program located in Southernmost Thailand) to improve the suitability of learning outcomes. This is consistent with the educational standards established by AUN-QA. AUN-QA Version 4 suggests that a program of study needs to get a true understanding of the requirements of stakeholders, especially external stakeholders in order to develop learning outcomes matched with the needs of industry or a real working life context (AUN-QA, 2020). In line with signaling theory, the B.B.A. Program should observe the signals from stakeholders (e.g. company's strategies and expectations) that could be useful for the curriculum design to meet the expectations and to achieve employability of graduates (König et al., 2021). It can be said that employability skills of human capital are crucial to ensure individuals' capabilities to obtain and maintain their jobs (PM et al., 2022).

However, the requirements of stakeholders may change over time due to changing levels of competition and work complexity (Raybould & Wilkins, 2005). For example, a study by Raybould and Wilkins (2005) argued that the role of management has shifted from management style of supervision and control to management style of leadership. Thus, the research findings on graduate attributes in past few decades or past few years could not be applied to this study, and more up-to-date research findings are required for developing ELOs for the current curriculum. Therefore, the formulation of ELOs in this article was based on the up-to-date information collected from external stakeholders.

## Conclusion

This study has thematically categorized and analyzed the data on the requirements of external stakeholders and used the refined themes to formulate ELOs for the B.B.A. Program. Qualitative research methodology used in this article could be applied to future research on this

issue. However, this study has some limitations. The formulation of ELOs in this study was specifically for the B.B.A. Program in Southernmost Thailand. The results could not be generalized to those B.B.A. Programs in other regions. Another limitation is that this study focused only on the requirements of external stakeholders when formulating the ELOs. Hence, future research should pay attention to exploring the needs of both internal and external stakeholders in order to gain a comprehensive view of stakeholders' needs. Additionally, future research on this issue may focus on measuring the achievement of ELOs to verify whether ELOs are achieved within the time of graduation or not. Formulating appropriate ELOs is part of the quality improvement of business administration programs that benefits graduates, employers, and other relevant stakeholders.

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